

Teaching Styles

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Why Things Matter:

Show students why they should care

Students often have a sense that they have to get the job done to meet a deadline. However, they may not know what the task means - why it is important to know the underlying skills and knowledge. Teachers need to communicate to students the purpose of the assignments (understanding the content they were learning) and the meaning of the assignments. They should be told what skills they will develop by doing the work, and how these skills will be useful, helpful, or enjoyable. (Jones, 1995) Mrs. Veayo, a science teacher at Mt. Blue Middle School in Farmington, told me that “She turns the question around in a Socratic fashion. She asks them why the topic matters. This gets them to think about it, and they uncover the ideas themselves. They come up with the reasons that the topic of that lesson matters to them.”

Positive Reinforcement:

Building a positive learning environment

Teachers who treat their students with respect, and maintain a positive atmosphere, will build a good relationship with their class. Talking with students, and listening to them talk about their interests, also helps build an atmosphere of trust. Using positive reinforcement can [help](#) in building up this learning environment. Students who like and respect their teacher will be more engaged, and less likely to disrupt a classroom. This can be especially helpful with problem students. By taking opportunities to praise their good behavior, a teacher can encourage these preferred behaviors and build a positive relationship and goodwill. Positive reinforcement not only helps bring attention to the behavior that gained approval, but also helps to build an atmosphere of trust and respect that can help to create a more positive and successful learning environment for all. Positive reinforcement is when the student behaves in a desirable way and there is a positive consequence that occurs right away. This will increase the desired behavior. Caution should be exercised in using positive reward, however. Praise should be given for the work and behavior - not for the student themselves. It should be sincere, and it should be reserved for times that the student earned it. Handing out praise where it is not earned lessens its value. It can also be something such as allowing them to do a fun activity, such as talking, games, sports, music, or watching a video. If it is an extrinsic reward, it must be something they would be willing to work for, and the amount must be appropriate. It must be something that is only available by doing the desired behavior. Also, using extrinsic rewards can lead to students focusing on the rewards themselves and becoming distracted from or losing intrinsic interest in the task. Some ways a teacher can do this in the classroom include: Standing at the door to greet students. Model courtesy. While students are working, walk around the room and reinforce students individually. Be specific about the work that is correct or well done. When handing papers back, reinforce students for good work. During classroom discussion, praise correct answers. Say things such as Excellent analysis, Clever point, Persuasive argument, Excellent analysis, and Well – chosen words.



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Sparkling Student Interest:

Increasing student participation via genuine interest and enthusiasm:

Teachers who display enthusiasm for their topic, and relate stories of how these skills have helped them in the past, help to stimulate students' own interest and involvement.

Students who feel they have a choice, who are actively involved in their education by having a voice in setting their goals and making decisions about attaining them, have a higher level of interest in the class. This has been shown to lead to the students achieving higher and more persistent levels of success. (Jones, 172)

Linking classroom activities to the students' interests can heighten their interest in the subject, especially in at-risk students. A teacher can set the stage at the beginning of a unit or series of lessons by asking students some questions. The teacher can guide the discussion to lead students to make connections between the material and their personal interests. Students who otherwise might not see the connections to their own interests may now become more involved and less likely to be off task and disruptive. This will result in their interest, motivation, and engagement being increased. (Jones, 189)

Increase Student Motivation And Learning:

Use of ongoing formative assessments by teachers helps to guide student efforts. This should be coupled with timely feedback of sincere recognition of progress, and specific and constructive suggestions for how to improve performance. This can help develop better practices and yield greater success for students in the classroom. (Jones, 174-6)

When a student achieves successful outcomes, and receives recognition for academic tasks, they will become more confident and motivated in the classroom. However, a student may experience failure when the task was too difficult. This could be because the amount of challenge wasn't appropriate for their level of competence. This may result in lowered confidence in the student. Because of this, they may set lower goals, and have reduced motivation. (Jones, 173-4) This could be avoided by using differentiated instruction to tier the level of challenge of assignments to be more appropriate to diverse students.

Some student activities that allow for active student involvement includes “think-pair-share, lively group discussions, cooperative learning, group projects, and telling of stories about personal experiences” (Kuykendall (1992) in Jones, 1995, p. 170) Mrs. Veayo, a science teacher at Mt. Blue Middle School, stated that she lets students get up to do stuff and move around. She allows some talk at the right times. She will relate a problem they are working on to their personal interests, and changes topics often so they aren’t bored.

There is a model that combines many factors involved in increasing student motivation. This is called the ARCS Model, by [John Keller](#). It stands for Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. By gaining students’ Attention and making content Relevant to the students’ everyday lives, this helps to increase their motivation. Also, by increasing their Confidence, as well as their Satisfaction, they become more motivated. Using data collection and evaluation, problems with motivation can be identified. These facts can be put into a design matrix that will allow us to determine where to focus efforts on developing strategies. Effective use of these strategies will strengthen the 4 factors that lead to student motivation.

Interacting with Students:

Happy medium:

There is a balance that must be struck in the classroom when working with students. Yes, you want to be positive and helpful, but you cannot be so friendly that you become a “push-over” in the eyes of your students. And yes, you want to have structure for your students, but you cannot be too strict that you lose your students completely. Paul Pedota, author of the article “Strategies for Effective Classroom Management in the Secondary Setting,” writes,

Everyone concedes that there is a severe shortage of qualified teachers in the United States and that one of the most frequent reasons cited in the literature regarding the problem of staffing and retaining qualified individuals is the lack of student discipline. In speaking to new and veteran teachers who have left the profession primarily due to discipline problems in the classroom, many have commented that although they felt that during the preteaching training period sufficient time was spent on classroom management, they were not truly prepared for the realities of the classroom, which contributed to feelings of frustration, anger, and helplessness (Pedota).

Discipline is easily managed with the right attitude and tools. Again, by practicing that balance between being a “push-over” and being very strict, students will react better to your teaching and their overall education. Those teachers who have found this balance found that with the right planning, they can react to any situation. The key to this balance is through creating a set of rules and policies for your classroom that are fair for both you and your students. Do not stray away from the rules/policies! They are there for a reason and will provide just enough structure for you to manage your classroom, even in the most unlikely of circumstances.

Within the classroom, there is an expected composure that all teachers must maintain in any subject. However, there will always be variables that test the mental and emotional health of teachers. And it is these emotions of stress, anger, frustration, etc., that will either make the day pleasant or awful; make you elated that you are a teacher or make you count down the minutes until the day is over. Not only is this affecting you as a teacher, your attitude will definitely influence your students as well. The best way to keep a pleasant demeanor for both you and your students is to practice the “[decide-first method](#).” Before class even begins, close the door to your classroom and sit down in a comfortable seat. Then close your eyes and take deep breaths. Lastly, reassure yourself that you will confront any situation that might happen that day with grace and with calm energy. By doing so, you will find yourself being more relaxed in these high-stress situations.



Consistency between classes:

Students work more efficiently in classrooms that are consistent. The [University of Louisville](#) defines consistency as “routines and physical arrangements that are applied and implemented in the same way on a regular basis. This helps students predict what will happen next and increases the probability of their success” (“Structure and...”). By being consistent in classroom procedures and strategies, students will respond better to your teachings. School Improvement Network explains, “Clarity is fundamental to consistency. Being clear to your students is vital to establishing a consistent environment. This includes clarity of expectations; clarity of a lesson and clarity of procedures.” Some great strategies to be clear with your students include planning ahead of time, making an agenda for each class day, and creating a syllabus that your students can get familiar with in order to understand the class expectations. When the rules and class expectations change constantly, students will react poorly and soon lose motivation.

Within actually teaching the material, teachers must be consistent in their strategies. [Lecturing](#) students for long periods of time consistently is not the direction to take with students. Some of the pros of lecturing include the fact that lectures are straightforward, they appeal to auditory and verbal learners, and the teacher has a lot of control over the content. However, there are plenty of cons for lecturing as well. These include the fact that giving lectures every class can be boring and result in lack of motivation and interest from students, students who are not auditory and verbal learners may not respond as well to this type of teaching, and students may not feel comfortable in asking questions during lecture periods. Teachers need to be consistent by switching up their teaching strategies and methods every class in order to appeal to a variety of intelligences. Getting students involved by letting them get hands-on with the material and being able to ask questions for better understanding is the best way for students to get engaged.

Applying Strategies:

Collaborative Teaching:

There are going to be times in your teaching career where you will have to co-teach or do team teaching with co-workers. Co-teaching has many benefits. Having two teachers in one classroom allows the students to connect to different personalities and it creates a totally different feel of community within the classroom. [Co-teaching](#) can be very hectic at times and teaching beliefs and strategies may not click at first, so there are some tips that can make a co-teaching pair very successful. Marisa Kaplan from Edutopia lists

1. "Say this mantra: "All students are our students."
2. Come to planning meetings prepared (with an agenda) to maximize co-planning time.
3. If you feel something, say something! Open communication is the key to a successful partnership.
4. Realize that the success of your class depends on the strength of your co-teaching relationship.
5. Use a variety of co-teaching models to help maintain equality. (Kaplan)

Teacher Positioning in the Classroom:

One of the more effective and easiest ways to make sure your students are on-task is by [positioning](#) yourself in different places throughout the class. This also helps when students have questions and allows you to have one-on-one time with students during work time as well. Let's say that you have an off-task student. An off-task student is a student who puts their energy into something that is not related to the activity in the classroom. This particular student is starting to distract the other students around him/her. How do you respond? Through relocating yourself to an area closer to that student or walking around the classroom, you send out a commanding disposition and the number of off-task students should decrease. This simple solution can be a better strategy than calling out verbal warnings and/or isolating the student.

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